**Title:** Recognising the particular intersectional role of ethnicity, nationality and gender within UK white-collar professions when considering and understanding how multiple identities are experienced at the intersection.

**Abstract**

Despite the gradual increase of research into the representation of multiple identities in and through organisational theories the number remains irrefutably low. Understanding the experience of multiple identities at the intersection is a complex notion; and under-researched within identity and organisational research. Despite increased conceptual developments in this area in recent years, researchers still point to a need for more empirical research that views identity through an intersectional lens in everyday organisational settings. The proposed study has the potential to address this dearth and also make a theoretical contribution by exploring how intersectional identities are experienced amongst a sample of female white-collar workers within UK organisations. by conducting online interviews with British ethnic minority, female, white-collar professionals to understand their experiences at work in light of a range of key work place outcomes.

**Submitted to Stream 12:** The work-life interface for workers with diverse and intersecting identities

**Stream Chairs:** Alexandra Beauregard, Eddy Ng

***Keywords****: ethnicity, nationality, gender, intersectionality, organisations, social identity.*

**Word count:** 3436

**Purpose**

Publicising the stories and articulating the narratives of all individuals within organisations, across different axes of identity practices is an important intervention for changing dominant organisational discourses because it brings to light alternative, mainly hidden narratives that rarely ﬁnd their way into mainstream accounts and organisational theories (Holvino, 2011; Calás and Smircich, 1999; Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Understanding identities in organisations is deemed progressively core to effectively implementing processes of organising (Brown, 2001; Lok, 2010; Ybema, et al., 2009) Yet there is a scarcity of UK research that appropriately reflects the ‘hidden’ experiences of multiple identities occurring at the intersection of ethnicity, nationality and gender in the workplace. This increasingly has become an issue of importance in light of a continuing rise in the number of black, Asian and other minority ethnic (BAME) employees entering the UK workforce (Wyatt and Silvester, 2015). According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data, BAME employees comprise 12.4% of the total UK working population (ONS, 2013; Wyatt and Silvester, 2015). In light of this, there is need for exploratory research that adopts an intersectional lens to understand more deeply the meaning of, and experiences related to, multiple social identities at work; to understand how particular yet ‘hidden’ experiences occurring at the intersection of multiple identities impact a range of key work-place outcomes such as work-life balance, health and wellbeing, and self-efficacy for career success. Intersectionality is the belief that social identities, such as ethnicity, race, nationality, gender and class interact to form qualitative different meanings and experiences of identity (Warner, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991). The term derives from the work of Crenshaw (1991) who highlighted the invisibility of African American women’s experiences, as a result of their minority standing in U.S race and gender research (Crenshaw, 1991; Showunmi et al., 2016; Thomas and Hollenshead, 2001). Typically, critical race and gender studies have adopted binary assumptions about experiences of gender and ethnic identity with little or no consideration of interaction between social identities (Crenshaw, 1991). For instance, where minority ethnicity and British nationality converge, it shapes the multiple dimensions of being a British BAME identity, when specifically considering 2nd or 3rd generation individuals; i.e. the 2nd or 3rd generation of a family to inhabit a country, but the first or second generation natively born in the country (Asher, 2011). The proposed study seeks to undertake an intersectional exploration of particular workplace experiences of British, BAME females. We seek to reveal how nationality, ethnic identity and gender intersections at the individual level, create complex organisational experiences of difference, relative to the individual.

There has been much research supporting the notion that, women are making considerable advances within work organisations (Ryan and Haslam, 2005). The past 40 years has seen an increase in studies focusing on equality and diversity in the workplace (Bendl et al., 2016; Briner and Atewologun, 2011; Wyatt and Silvester, 2015). However, diversity research has focused predominantly on ‘people of colour’, particularly ‘men of colour’ from a U.S, Western perspective (Ely and Thomas, 2001; Rodriguez and Freeman, 2016). Similarly, gender research has focused largely on Western-European women, thus the understanding of gender and its implications for behaviour has been primarily Western-centric and thus ethnocentric (Ryan and Branscombe, 2013; Bendl et al., 2016). Gender research asserts that womens’ experiences of gender cannot be homogenised (Ryan and Branscombe, 2013). Intersectionality research emphasises that the relationship between gender and ethnicity is complex with inherent variation and that the relationship between such identity categories is not simply an additive one (McCall, 2005; Showunmi et al., 2016). In the UK context, to overlook the specific workplace experiences of British BAME women at the traverse of their national, ethnic and gender identities would be to disregard the limitations of gender and ethnicity as singular analytical categories. Showunmi et al (2016) assert that requesting people should account for experiences based on one category (e.g. ethnicity) to the exclusion of others (e.g. gender) is an invalid conceptualisation of reality, when membership of both is confounded in individuals (Showunmi et al., 2016). This notion is essentialist in its construction. Gelman (2005) upholds that essentialism is the view that certain single identity categories (e.g., gender, racial groups, etc.) have an underlying reality or true nature, furthermore this underlying reality or true nature is said to give ‘objects’, (individuals) their identity. Intersectionality as a theoretical perspective suggests that essentialist assumptions are far from watertight, in that intersectionality draws attention to interactions occurring between multiple categories, which in turn create a unique experience relative to the individual. Within the proposed study, we seek to contribute to organisational literature and organisational theories that publicise how the combination of non-mainstream identities may alter females’ workplace realities, in accordance with current organisational literature. The steadfast inclusion of intersectionality as a theoretical construct is therefore crucial and imminent; to avoid neglecting or misrepresenting the workplace experiences of British women from BAME identities as well as the experiences of other forms of non-mainstream identity. In the proposed research, we will focus on white-collar workers as Whyte (1956) asserted over 50 years ago that white-collar work would typify life in the second half of the 20th century. In a Western context, a white-collar worker is someone who performs professional, managerial or some form of administrative work (Scase, 2016). It refers to employees or professionals whose work is knowledge intensive, non-routine and unstructured, needing at least an undergraduate degree or equivalent to practice. White-collar work organisations are often bureaucratic, which can mean having to conform to behaviours prescribed by the firm; looking and behaving in a way to avoid bringing attention to oneself, this idea has been termed the ‘organisational man’ (Whyte, 1956; Maume and Houston, 2001). However, research contends that firms seeking the ‘organisational man’ are often unable to visualise or adapt to the ‘organisational women’ we take it one step further and say they are equally often unable to adapt to the organisational ‘other’ or organisational ‘non-mainstream identity’. This research seeks to adopt an intersectional lens to understand the non-mainstream yet unique experiences of British BAME females within professional organisational settings.

**Methodology**

*Research Question*

What are the particular workplace experiences of professional British females from black, Asian and other minority ethnic identities (BAME) at the intersection of their ethnicity, national identity and gender?

In order to answer the research question and to aptly consider and understand how multiple identities are actually experienced at the intersection.A qualitative methodological design will be employed. According to McCall (2005) qualitative research enables one to explore the complexities of social life to reveal diversity, variation and heterogeneity; thus, qualitative research is particularly pertinent when examining social processes. (Showunmi et al., 2016). We will conduct online written interviews conducted via the Google Drive’s online Google Docs web based shared documents. Interviews will be semi-structured consisting of 10-15 well-chosen and well-phrased open questions to be delivered in a set order. Participants will be separately interviewed to get their specific views in relation to, two key themes: 1) their personal experiences of work-life balance, health and wellbeing, and self-efficacy for career success. 2) their personal experiences of work-life balance, health and wellbeing, and self-efficacy for career success, particularly relevant to experiences as a woman; as a British individual with a BAME identity and finally as a British woman with a BAME identity.The overarching aim of this study is to provide rich contextualised knowledge of this sample. Preliminary questions will ask: *“please can you describe your experiences at work in relation to your work-life balance?” (e.g. do you work longer/shorter hours than others, do you have enough time for your-self?);* *“please can you describe your experiences at work in relation to any social-life aspects at work?” (e.g. friendship groups, socialising outside of the working environment”)* and *“please can you describe your experiences at work in relation to your health and well-being?” (e.g. physical health, happiness, emotions or mood).* These questions will be followed-up with questions that require participants to consider their initial answers in view of the intersectional role of ethnic identity, nationality and gender, such as: *“How are any of your previous experiences particularly relevant to your experience as a woman?”; “How are any of your previous experiences particularly relevant to your experience as a British individual with a BAME identity?”* and *“How are any of your previous experiences particularly relevant to your experience as a British woman with a BAME identity?”* The sample will comprise 20 British female white-collar professionals from BAME identities. The sample will be illustrative of various examples of professional British women with BAME identities; to represent the breadth of their profiles and experiences as well as adequately reflect the diversity of the group. Participants will self-identify as professional British women with a BAME identity. A snowball sampling technique will be used. Data will be subject to thematic template analysis, an approach that relies heavily on recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994). This method will abstract core analytical themes and important patterns of information that will be contained within the data set. The use of qualitative data analysis software Nvivo, will make it possible to automate the data processing, allowing for analytical rigour. (Chasserio et al., 2014). An initial version of the coding template will be developed on the basis of a subset of the data, rather than carrying out preliminary coding and clustering on all accounts before defining the thematic structure. The subset selected must capture a good sub-section of the issues and experiences covered in the data as a whole; this will be facilitated by selecting a varied proportion of initial accounts to analyse. We intend interviews to happen in summer (June/July) 2017. Findings should be available for the next EDI conference.

**Research Limitations and Implications**

From the few objections to qualitative explorations of intersectional identity interplays that can be made, perhaps the most apparent is the use of a qualitative research design due to the limited extent to which findings are generalisable to the wider population. However, the research aim is not to generalise study findings, but rather to provide an in-depth analysis of particular cases, resulting in a learning opportunity concerning, how can we better know and understand experiences occurring at the intersection of multiple identities at work organisations in the UK context?

A further limitation is the unique nature of the chosen sample, in that we have chosen to narrate the stories of British, BAME, female white-collar professionals. These narratives may be atypical for British minority ethnic individuals, the majority of whom are less structurally advantaged (Atewologun and Sealy, 2014). However, the proposed study does not seek to emphasise multiple disadvantaged identities, as past intersectionality research has (Collins, 1986; Acker, 2006; Bell, 1990). It rather seeks to explore a slightly removed notion of intersectional identity interplays within social contexts by investigating female gender and minority ethnicity relationship in the UK context, with seemingly privileged organisational status. This is mainly due to the work of Atewologun and Sealy (2014) which reveals how context and interpersonal encounters become relevant for understanding experiences in relation to identity. They state, “white ethnicity may be privileged in many contexts, but in certain client relationships, communities and professions, whiteness may be a less significant privilege marker, compared to social class, able-bodiedness and gender” (Atewolgun and Sealy, 2014, pp.424). This supports the idea that intrapersonal experiences of social identity categories cannot always be homogenised; as shifts in experiences will occur in accordance with shifts in physical space (social context). Therefore, the request that individuals should account for experiences based on a single category (e.g. ethnicity) to the exclusion of others (e.g. gender) is an invalid conceptualisation of reality (Showunmi et al., 2016).

**Value of the paper**

The contribution that the proposed study will make is two-fold. Firstly, it will contribute to the initiation of much needed academic debate concerning how can we better know and understand the experiences of multiple, intersectional identities within work organisations in the UK context, this in turn will provide impetus for increased conceptual development of identity through an intersectional lens. The proposed study seeks to respond to the call of Plaut (2010) for the need for diversity knowledge, to better understand implications for the success of diverse environments from the perspective of minority and majority group members along multiple dimensions of difference. Whilst some conceptual developments have already occurred, (Holvino, 2011; Showunmi et al., 2016) There is need for more, specifically within the UK context. Secondly it will outline the role that properly understanding intersectional identity in the UK is to play in reducing inequality and boosting national economic growth (OECD, 2016). Almost all minority groups had unemployment rates that were double the national average (6.6%) in 2013 (Sunak and Rajeswaran, 2014). Recent Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) research has shown that if not for the widening economic and income disparities in the UK, the cumulative economic growth rate would have been six to nine percentage points higher and that greater equality helped to increase GDP per capita in Spain, France and Ireland prior to the 2009 crisis (OECD, 2016). This compelling evidence supports the notion that countries who embrace diversity policy and promote equal opportunities for all, from an early age are those that will grow and prosper. This has become a critical requirement in view of the projection that people from ethnic minority backgrounds are due to make up nearly a third of the UK’s population by 2050 (Coleman, 2010; Sunak and Rajeswaran, 2014). The dearth of UK research that appropriately reflects the reality of ‘hidden’ experiences of multiple identities occurring at the intersection of ethnicity, nationality and gender for ethnic minority members, means that ‘identity’ research is failing to meet the analytical benchmark in either theoretical considerations of identity interplays at the intrapersonal level, or in empirical studies of identity in practice. It is to these ends the proposed study aims to contribute.

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Autobiographical Information

Within her current job role Victoria works as a Senior Lecturer within Bath Business School; Bath Spa University. Her teaching responsibilities lie within Organisational Behaviour and the Business Environment. Victoria is also undertaking her PhD within Organisational Psychology at the University of Exeter and is co-supervised by Prof Michelle Ryan and Prof Ruth Sealy. Victoria’s research interests are situated within Organisational Behaviour, Organisational Psychology; with specific interest into the role of women in view of the considerable advances they have made within work organisations and research pertaining to social identity theory, equality and diversity in the workplace and the notion of ‘hidden’ experiences of intersectional identity within the workplace.